



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## **Amendment 15 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Available for Public Review and Comment**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is now accepting comments on Amendment 15 to the subject FMP. The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) submitted Amendment 15 for review, approval, and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce. Amendment 15 proposes two actions, which are briefly summarized below.

- Establish a limited access system for the commercial fishery for Gulf and Atlantic group king mackerel, and
- Change the fishing year for Atlantic migratory groups of king and Spanish mackerel to March 1 through February 28-29.

The intent of the proposed actions is to provide for social and economic stability in the mackerel fisheries. For a complete description of the actions, please obtain a copy of Amendment 15 (see Addresses and Dates).

### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

*Limited Access System:* A moratorium on the issuance of new commercial king mackerel vessel permits was established in 1998, and is in effect through October 15, 2005. The Councils' intent in establishing a moratorium was to later replace it with a more permanent limited access system. The existing restricted number of fishery participants, especially in the Gulf of Mexico, has demonstrated the capability of harvesting the allowable catch well in advance of the end of the fishing season. Opening the fishery to new participants would hasten closures in the various sub-zones. The Councils' proposed action would maintain a permit cap on participation for an indefinite period of time, and provides for social and economic stability in the fishery.

*Change in Atlantic Group Mackerel Fishing Year:* The current fishing year for Atlantic groups of both king and

Spanish mackerel extends from April 1 through March 31. A March closure would adversely affect the social and economic stability of South Atlantic fisheries due to other commercial closures, such as those for red porgy, gag, and black grouper during that same month. By changing the opening date of the season to March 1, the Councils reduce the possibility of multiple commercial fishery closures, and provide economic and social benefits to the fishery.

### **ADDRESSES AND DATES:**

Copies of Amendment 15, which includes an Environmental Assessment, a Regulatory Impact Review, and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis are available from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 10000, Tampa, Florida. 33619-2272; phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015; toll free: 1-888-833-1844; email: [gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org).

Written comments regarding Amendment 15 must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, on May 6, 2005. Comments may be submitted via email, written correspondence, or fax.

**E-mail:** 0648-AS53.NOA@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AS53-NOA.

**Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:** Follow the instructions at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

**Mail:** Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, Florida 33702.

**Fax:** From March 7 through March 17, 2005, fax to 727-570-5583. From March 22 through May 6, 2005, fax to 727-824-5308. No fax option is available from March 18 through 21, 2005.

A proposed rule that would implement measures outlined in Amendment 15 has been received from the Councils, and that proposed rule also will be published in the *Federal Register* for public review and comment. Comments received by May 6, 2005, will be considered by NMFS in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment. All comments received by NMFS on the amendment or the proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats

through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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